

Wycombe Wanderers

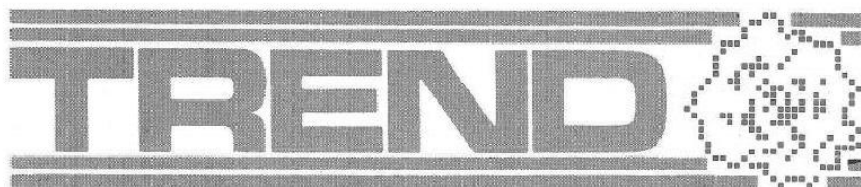
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Handbook 1987-88



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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the Wycombe Wanderers Handbook 1987/88, the third produced by the current Editorial team of Paul Lewis and myself.

Looking back over the three seasons we have been fortunate enough to have reviewed, we have been very lucky to have been faced with relatively easy tasks; 84/85 Promotion to the Gola League, 85/86 a thoroughly enjoyable and eventful season despite relegation, and 86/87 three trophies and promotion to the G.M.V.C.

Back in July 1986 watching the Wanderers slump to an embarrassing 3-1 defeat at the hands of Buckingham in a behind-closed-doors friendly at Bisham Abbey, did not inspire too much optimism towards the forthcoming season.

Alan Gane seemed to face an almost no-win situation. The Wycombe public expected nothing less than the League Championship itself, as indeed, no doubt, did the Yeovil public. Many predicted a two-horse race, and in the end they were right. The Club had committed itself to promotion to the G.M.V.C. (which inevitably meant that we would actually have to win the league,) and from then promotion to the Football League. With a similar ambition facing Yeovil, failure for us could have meant a frustrating 'spell' at the Vauxhall-Opel League with diminishing crowds, but instead success brought us more support and I for one had never envisaged printing 1,500 programmes for an "Isthmian" League match.

As the pre-season friendlies started, I personally felt that the signings that had been made would not be enough. With no disrespect to the players involved, very little was known of the likes of Kevin Durham, Paul Hackett, Andy Graham and Byron

Walton, who not only had the task of replacing the likes of Anton Vircavs, Declan Link and Simon Read, but also had to improve on that team. Then rumours started to spread around Loakes Park that we had signed two Enfield players Noel Ashford and Keith Barrett. "Didn't they used to play for England?" quizzed a more knowledgeable non-league follower. Suddenly the crowd was buzzing, and they never stopped buzzing for the rest of the season. Never in my memory has a season been so packed full of memorable events, the League Championship, the Berks & Bucks Cup, the Presidents Cup, record successive League wins, record number of wins, points and goals, headline signings not only of Ashford and Barrett, but also Barry Silkman, Declan Link, Carl Hoddle and ex-England Youth International Jason Seacole, and of course one who did not make the headlines when he signed, but deserved them in the end, Kirk Corbin. There were some incredible games at Loakes Park against Kingstonian, Windsor, Walthamstow and Barnet, and even more away from home at Slough, Barking, Orient, Bishops Stortford, Bognor, Dulwich and of course at Wolverton. All in all, personally it was my most enjoyable season in 17 years watching the club, and yes I do remember Middlesbrough. You all know the story of the season, but it's so good to relive it occasionally and so we give thanks to all those who played a part in achieving that success, and to all the contributors and advertisers who have made this publication possible.

My special thanks also to John Goldsworthy and P. K. Graphics for their special help towards producing this handbook.

Happy reading.....

Philip Ball

p.k. graphics

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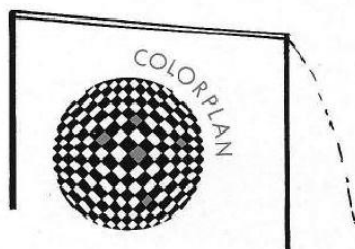
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FOREWARD

By Brian Lee

A season is a long time in the life of a football club especially when so many events can be crowded into a short space of time. This time last year we were reviewing our debut season in the Gola League when three points were awarded for an away win and two points for a home win. If only the rewards, appertaining last season, had applied the previous season — 3 points for a win home or away — we would not have been relegated. On the other hand we may not have enjoyed an exciting last season when interest in the club was aroused, gates increased and promotion gained.

This season we are going to experience a further experiment in our league by way of players not being offside from a free kick. Whilst it is good for the Conference to head the way, I only hope that the real issues of bread and butter league football in this country — promotion and relegation are not settled in the last match of the season by a controversial experimental decision.

Last season also hallmarked the arrival of two England Non League Internationals, and both Keith Barratt and Noel Ashford played significant parts in the league success. For a club who regularly produced international players in the old amateur days, it was particularly pleasing to see Noel play for his Country again and the Club represented at the highest level of Non League Football.

A further milestone was the activation of the Football Club Company and the new Board of Directors during the season and I would like to express my thanks to my colleagues for making a significant start to taking the Club into next decade.

The vexed question of finding a new site for the football ground to go along with our ambitions and

enabling the hospital to expand, continues to rear its head. The present proposal will soon be resolved, but whatever the decision, the Board is determined to develop the Club on and off the field in readiness for further challenges in the football world.

All the above of course, points towards the most exciting 'Break' for Non League Football in that promotion can now be automatic from the Conference into the Football League.

At the time we played in the Alliance it was known as the Gola League and now we return to the GM Conference — a rather confusing situation for somebody just dropping in from a neighbouring planet! Whatever the name, whoever the sponsors, the most important thing is that Wycombe Wanderers are back in the top flight of Non League Football.

Whilst we should congratulate Scarborough and wish them well in the Today Fourth Division we should also remember former Isthmians, Wimbledon, who played with skill and pride in the toughest football league in the world. These two clubs are the examples that we should all want to follow.

To all those people connected with the Club, either in the dressing room, in the Club or on the terraces, I hope we all enjoy an exciting season, with sportsmanship and team spirit at the top of the list of ingredients. Remember, football is a game of skill to be played fairly, but if it is not played fairly it cannot be played skillfully.

Lastly, our thanks are due to Philip Ball and Paul Lewis for researching, co-ordinating and producing this review of the 1986/7 season.

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THE STORY OF THE SEASON

The Capital League Presidents Cup may not be the world's most prestigious of football competitions, even to clubs at our level, but by 9.15 on the night of 8th May 1987, it had become another glorious symbol of a superbly successful season for Wycombe Wanderers F.C. As hundreds of supporters gathered in front of the main stand at Loakes Park for the presentation of the Trophy, most Blues fans had become quite familiar with the routine; in the preceding weeks there had been memorable scenes of celebration at Bognor Regis the night the Vauxhall-Opel League Championship was won, to be followed by the presentation of the Championship Trophy at Hitchin five days later, the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup at Wolverton a week later, and League Championship medals to the players after the final, record-breaking, victory at Dulwich on the last Saturday of the league season. Thus the Presidents Cup became the Club's third trophy of the campaign and provided us all with a fitting finale to an unforgettable season; a season which, following relegation from the Gola League could have easily seen a significant decline in the Club's fortunes, but in fact ended with Wycombe having enjoyed its best period for many years. This was well illustrated by a remarkable increase in attendances at Loakes Park. The average attendance for home league games was 1129, the highest recorded since 1976 and substantially higher even than in the solitary Gola League season, providing proof — if any was needed — of the potential support the Club can attract at Loakes

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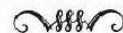
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Park. No less than ten home fixtures were watched by crowds in excess of 1,000, two of which were over 2,000. There was no shortage of support at away games either, with 19 Premier Division Clubs enjoying their highest league attendance when the "Chairboys" were visiting. In terms of results, the defeats suffered in the F.A. Trophy and F.A. Cup would, in other years, have started waves of criticism and protest from all quarters, but there was never any question that the VOL Championship, and hence a return to the newly named G.M. Vauxhall Conference, was the absolute priority; and so consistently did Alan Gane's men perform over the 42 league fixtures that, overall, the only people who had a poor season at Loakes Park were the moaners and whingers. Obviously there will be opportunities for them to bite again next season as the team will inevitably find life infinitely more difficult in the Conference — now generally accepted by the National media and general public alike as the Football League's Fifth Division, complete with its promotion and relegation to and from Division Four. But for the time being a VOL playing record of 32 wins, 5 draws and only 5 defeats — with over 100 points and 100 goals to the Club's name — is one to cherish and remember for some time to come.

It would, however, be fair to say that such success had not been widely anticipated before the season began. Expectations did rise considerably, though, when it was announced that two established Non-League International players had been signed from Enfield at a combined cost of £8,000. Keith Barrett, though a very different style of defender, was a natural replacement for Anton Vircavs, who had earlier been transferred to Cheltenham Town — ironically, largely due to Anton's wish to remain on the Gola/G.M.V.C. circuit, with or without Wycombe Wanderers. As for Noel Ashford, he quickly became something of a folk-hero with the Loakes Park fans, being that relatively rare type of forward able to combine irresistible natural skill with 100% commitment to his team's cause. The signing of these two players — in itself a major shock to the Non-League Football World — indicated a degree of ambition within the Club that instantly revived many people's enthusiasm for the coming season.

With the sleeping giant of Yeovil Town again poised to challenge for the VOL title it was evident that nothing less than an exceptional season would be sufficient to take the top spot; expectation were raised further by three pre-season victories over GMVC opposition. Just one month later, hopes were positively soaring as the 8th league fixture was completed with a 100% record intact.



Kevin Collins waves a final farewell to the Wycombe fans as he departs for Australia. He captained us for the first third of the season.

Croydon were the first of the eight in our opening fixtures, which featured the irrepressible Byron Walton scoring our first goal of the campaign in bizarre fashion, tapping into an empty net while the visitors lined up a defensive wall for a free-kick which their goalkeeper was still debating with the referee. Three days later our 2nd fixture, at Richmond Road, Kingston — one of our old familiar Isthmian venues — was decided by a Mark West goal in the opening 30 seconds. At Walthamstow the following Saturday it was necessary to come from behind with two superbly headed goals from West and Walton to earn win number 3, and Windsor were comfortably beaten at Loakes Park to make it 12 points out of 12. That brought us to a home fixture with Bognor Regis, who themselves had begun the season well and had a full England International, Dave Thomas, in their line-up. A 2-1 win for the Blues was earned by virtue of an own goal (we had much to thank Bognor for this season!) but was particularly creditable for the way the team coped with the loss of Gary Lester through injury for much of the second half, the green shirt first being taken by Noel Ashford and then Graham Bressington — an experience that was to stand

“Bressie” in good stead for a full 90 minutes between the sticks at Farnborough six months later.

Church Road, Hayes is still one of Wycombe’s least favourite grounds, but one man had a particular reason for wanting to do well there on this occasion — Byron Walton, who had left Hayes as their leading goalscorer during the close season. His two second-half goals were enough for a very satisfying 2-0 win, and morale among the Wanderers and their Supporters was sky high as we travelled to Bromley on the first Saturday of September. The scoreline of Bromley 0 Wycombe 4 was no more than an accurate reflection of the difference between the two sides, as was graciously acknowledged by several Bromley fans as well as their local paper, which wrote about the Blues performance in glowing terms. Now on the crest of a wave, a Tuesday night match against newly-promoted St. Albans brought the seasons first 1,000 plus crowd to Loakes Park. With 7 wins from 7 games, local interest in Wycombe Wanderers was beginning to increase noticeably. St. Albans may have thought so, as Noel Ashford opened the scoring with an exquisitely curved ground shot just inside a post from 25 yards. The final result of 3-0 sent most Wycombe people home happy, with the exception of Kevin Durham, who unfortunately sustained an injury which was to keep him on the side-lines for some time.

Thoughts of league results were temporarily put aside for the launch of the Club’s ambitious “League Line” promotion at the Town Hall, an event attended by supporters, officials, players and celebrities such as Alan Parry and Steve Coppell. Our first Cup match of the season brought Hornchurch to Loakes Park in the A.C. Delco Cup — the Division

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2 side probably feared a hiding but in the event were unlucky to lose 3-2, coming desperately close to forcing a replay when a header struck the underside of Gary Lester's crossbar in the last minute of extra-time.

As far as the sequence of league wins was concerned, the bubble had to burst sometime, and burst it did when Farnborough snatched a last-minute winner at Loakes Park the following Saturday.



Noel Ashford rounds Yeovil defender Tom Ritchie during our 2-1 defeat at the Huish

Then came the eagerly awaited trip to Yeovil. 3169 vociferous fans at the Huish ground gave the match an atmosphere not usually associated with the Isthmian League – nor the G.M.V.C., or even the 4th Division of the Football League for that matter. In a very evenly matched, tense contest Yeovil's late winner gave them all three points when many observers felt that a draw would have been a fairer result. Though the defeat was disappointing, it was certainly no disaster, being just one of 42 league matches to be played, but this result was followed by a frustrating goalless draw at home to Bishops Stortford, and then a 2-1 defeat at Harrow – despite the surprise appearance of ex-professional star Barry Silkman in a Wycombe shirt for the first time. This was another game which we were probably a little unfortunate to lose – suddenly, after having taken 24 points from the first 8 league matches, only a single point had come from the last 4 games. Clearly it was crucial to regain the winning habit as soon as possible but this was not, we feared, going to be easy – at Slough.

The pressure was all on Wycombe. Another defeat, it seemed, would raise questions as to the team's championship hopes, whereas Slough Town, who we all knew would like nothing more than to put a nice big dent in their local rivals' promotion dreams, were right on form. Over 1400 people – probably 50% from Wycombe – witnessed a 3-0 win for the "Chairboys" with goals by Graham (2) and Ashford giving a slightly flattering but very welcome scoreline in our favour, and putting the name of Wycombe Wanderers back on top of the V.O.L. table, with now a third of the league programme completed.

On a cool Saturday in October, Tooting at home



Barry Silkman in control at Harrow, whilst Richard Blue looks on

is not – with no disrespect intended to Tooting – usually one of our most attractive fixtures but on this particular weekend the town's people obviously wanted to see Wycombe play, and play they certainly did. With the prospect of Barry Silkman's home debut for the Wanderers and the Club looking down on the rest of the league, a crowd of 1243 turned out. Attendances of this size for routine league fixtures had not been seen at Loakes Park since the mid – 70's, and the extra supporters must have gone home delighted with what they had seen. The score-line of 4-0 gives only a partial indication to the ease and style with which victory was achieved that afternoon, though with the points always apparently secure there was little need for much over-exertion. At times the Silkman and Ashford Show was pure football theatre, and the memory of Barry leaving the pitch with applause ringing around the ground after a typical piece of trickery had set up Mark West for a goal just seconds earlier, will remain with many of us for a long time.



Noel Ashford thumps Wycombe's first in the 3-0 victory at Slough

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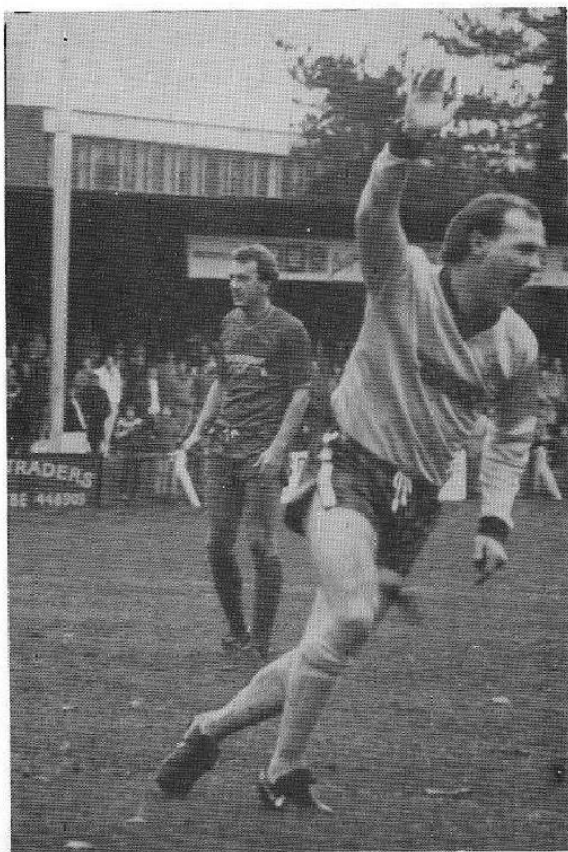
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Jason Seacole turns away triumphantly after notching the first of his hat-trick in the 4-2 victory over Worthing

7 days later, however, the script went badly wrong when Southern League VS Rugby arrived for an F.A. Cup 4th Qualifying Round tie. Despite their large support, they were generally regarded as being lambs to the slaughter but a sloppy goal to the visitors in the first minute, followed by a second soon after, sent the Blues on the way to a disastrous and embarrassing 5-1 home defeat. Thankfully, winning ways were restored the following Saturday, with a 4-2 league win at home to Worthing, and 3 days later with a 2-1 home win over Hayes, though not before the Middlesex side had taken an early lead. A dour match at Wokingham on a typically bumpy surface earned 3 more points by virtue of Byron Walton's quick thinking in setting up Noel Ashford for a second half winner, before Yeovil visited Loakes Park for a Tuesday night tie in the newly established G.M. Acceptance Corporation Cup (our very own Full Members Cup). This time Byron's enthusiasm resulted only in a long-term injury for Yeovil's £7,000 defender Tony Ricketts, and we slumped to a 4-1 defeat. Alan Gane then shocked everyone by announcing that Barry Silkman was to be released — not because of the other players reactions to his dress sense but because his flamboyant style of play had left the team vulnerable defensively. Such was the respect that Alan Gane now commanded among Supporters that little dissent was voiced from the terraces; similarly, only mild disagreement was expressed when the controversial step was taken to drop Mark West, then the VOL leading goalscorer, for the visit to Wokingham. Certainly there were few complaints as Hendon were demolished 5-0 at Loakes Park. Lowly

Worthing paid another visit for a midweek A.C. Delco Cup tie, played in torrential rain, and were beaten 2-1 after extra time, with Jason Seacole having netted a late equaliser in the first 90 minutes.



Despair on the faces of the Yeovil defenders, as Andy Graham forces the ball home. Yeovil had the last laugh as they won this GMAC Cup tie 4-1.



Jason Seacole fires home this very late equaliser to force extra-time in the A.C. Delco Cup tie against Worthing

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Wycombe now faced a sequence of three difficult away league fixtures on consecutive Saturdays, at Bishops Stortford, Barking, and Hendon. To Yeovil's acute disappointment, maximum points were taken from a trio of full-blooded matches involving a total of 17 goals. A powerful all-round performance at Rhodes Avenue had Stortford well and truly beaten by a score of 4-1, Noel Ashford opening the scoring in typically spectacular fashion, with second half goals by Seacole, Ashford again, and an own goal sealing the points. Then it was time for the visit to highly-placed Barking – George Borg, ploughed pitch and all. A goalless first half gave little indication of what was to come in the second period. Firstly a temporary floodlight failure delayed the restart – giving some Blues fans the chance to leave their Essex rivals in no doubt as to their opinions on their attempts to raise the Barking ground to the required Premier Division standard – and seven goals were interrupted by an injury to the match referee, who was eventually replaced by a linesman.



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Goals from Graham, Day, Durham and Walton had Wycombe leading 4-2 as the game entered its final stages. Barking succeeded in reducing the arrears to 3-4 and piled forward in a last-ditch attempt to level the scores, as the travelling Wycombe fans howled for the final whistle. With Gary Lester in some pain from a leg injury, the ball landed invitingly in the Wycombe 6 yard box, as our watches showed the game moving into the TENTH minute of stoppage time – Gary could only watch as the shot rebounded off his post before bouncing off himself, whereupon he was able to grab the ball, and the final whistle confirmed that it would be another happy journey home, with 3 more vital points in the bag.



Kevin Day heads home his only goal of the season in the mud at Barking

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And so to Hendon — no-one could say life with Wycombe was dull. The North London side, vastly improved from the outfit who had been swamped at Loakes Park 3 weeks earlier, spent most of the first half pressing forward determinedly but were left gasping by some ruthless finishing at the other end, with Durham, West and a crashing volley by Andy Graham giving Wanderers a 3-0 half-time lead. The second half, covered by LBC Radio, brought 2 goals for Hendon — one an own goal by Anthony Riley, the other a penalty — a double sending-off, with Graham Bressington taking the long walk to the dressing room after almost every player on the pitch had become involved in a brief flare-up — and the Wycombe debuts of Mark Dawber, a young winger signed from Woking, and Kirk Corbin, a free transfer from Wokingham. Mark's performances improved significantly as the season progressed and looked a fine prospect for the future, while Kirk almost immediately established himself as possibly one of the finest defenders ever seen in

more Cup defeats were just around the corner. Yeovil, once again, won 2-1 at Loakes Park after extra time in the A.C. Delco Cup, and VOL Division 2 side Leatherhead held out for a 0-0 draw in the 1st Round of the F.A. Trophy. The replay at Fetcham Grove, on a cold night two days before Christmas would have been won with a little more luck, but one could not begrudge Leatherhead their 1-0 win, disappointing though it may have been at the time. With the benefit of hindsight, of course, it can now be seen that early Cup defeats can be a blessing in disguise for a Club with league title aspirations — as any Aylesbury fan would agree.



Anthony Riley's delight is clear as he scores a rare goal against Dulwich

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It was against Kirk's former team-mates that the next league win was recorded, 2-0 at home against Wokingham, and Dulwich were comfortably beaten 4-1 (the ever-popular Anthony Riley notching a rare goal, this time at the correct end) for Wycombe's 11th consecutive league victory. But 2

One of the most remarkable matches seen at Loakes Park took place on the first Saturday after Christmas. Just over 1,000 people were present to witness, we hoped, Wycombe break a long-standing club record by winning their 12th consecutive league match, against Chris Kelly's Kingstonian team. Kelly's men immediately tore the script into shreds by racing into a 2-0 lead, and for a while Wycombe looked totally bewildered. Jason Seacole pulled a goal back before half-time, renewing hope for the home fans, but with less than 5 minutes remaining in the second half the Kingstonian defence was looking comfortable and confident of holding out for a 2-1 win. Mark West, however, is always likely to snatch a goal-or-two and he equalised smartly and set up an astonishing finale, reminiscent of the previous season's win at Enfield. Kingstonian were well worth the draw they appeared to have earned, but with literally seconds remaining a corner-kick eventually landed right in front of "Westie", who gleefully nudged the ball over the line for a 3-2 win which had Wycombe supporters dancing with delight; the final whistle blew and immediately the celebrating fans heard from the Tannoy Man that Yeovil had just lost at home to Croydon. It was, to put it mildly, a perfect end to the year.

Starting 1987 with a league record of played 24, won 20, drawn 1, lost 3, and Alan Gane's men now seemingly capable of winning vital games even when not playing particularly well, it was something of a shock to lose to a team of Croydon's calibre (no

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disrespect intended to them) though previous bleak experiences at the Croydon "Sports Arena" and their recent win at Yeovil had given some warning. With Rick Collier standing in for the absent Gary Lester, a soft goal was conceded early on and Mark West's impetuous retaliation reduced our line-up to 10 men; the subsequent inevitable 75 minutes of frustration and another poor playing surface meant we left defeated but comforted by the knowledge that morale at Yeovil would be a lot lower than ours, as their Manager Gerry Gow had announced his resignation shortly before his sides 1-1 draw at Hendon.



Noel Ashford fires home this penalty to earn a 1-0 victory over Hitchin

A late penalty converted by Noel Ashford gave us a narrow 1-0 win at home to Hitchin the following Tuesday, an evening enlightened by the popular return of Declan Link to Loakes Park after a year-long absence. With the points gap between Yeovil and ourselves steadily increasing, and Alan Gane's squad improved significantly by the signings of Corbin, Dawber and now Link, there was (cautious) optimism among Wycombe fans looking forward to the final run in for the league title. Little resistance was anticipated from the sadly troubled Walthamstow Avenue, for whom merely completing fixtures had become something of an achievement in itself, and the 7-1 score-line was no surprise. After a couple of weeks of cold weather, and the few obligatory postponements, Bromley arrived in good form and ready to test Wycombe's playing strengths to the limit — which they did, but not in the way most of us had expected. Some of the tackling left a lot to be desired — Mark Dawber was carried off, a Bromley player was later sent off — but nevertheless the Wycombe players held their nerve and secured a solid 3-0 victory, while one or two

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visiting players apparently considered it more worthwhile to exchange threats with members of the paying public.



Keith Barrett leaves everyone stranded with this headed goal against Walthamstow

The following week proved to be a very entertaining one for the "Chairboys". On the Tuesday evening, Windsor and Eton provided the opposition for a Berks and Bucks Senior Cup tie. Though the Berkshire outfit were struggling at the wrong end of the Premier Division table, a tricky match was envisaged by most. It didn't exactly turn out that way though — After 15 minutes Wycombe had scored 4 times, led 7-0 by half-time, and finally ran out 11-1 winners. Supporters' delight at the proceedings was tempered only by the knowledge that Windsor were to be Yeovil's next opponents for league points, apparently giving little prospect of a result in our favour.

Our first Isthmian League visit to Clarence Park, St. Albans for many years, attracted a good crowd to the picturesque ground on a sunny January afternoon. Graham Bressington — put us a goal up on the half hour mark with a well struck, accurate ground shot from 20 yards, and further goals from Link (2) and Seacole completed a superb 4-1 win for the Blues over a very useful St. Albans team. Supporters were ready for an evening of celebration, regardless of the days other results, but when Radio 2 announced a result of Windsor 1 Yeovil 0, things began to get out of hand in some quarters....

Wycombe Wanderers were now sitting proudly at the top of the league table, with a staggering 17 points between themselves and 2nd placed Yeovil. It was evident that only a major disaster could cause such a lead to be lost — but of course, no chickens can ever be counted in football until they are well and truly hatched (12 months earlier, relatively few Wycombe people considered there to be much danger of relegation from the Gola League). There

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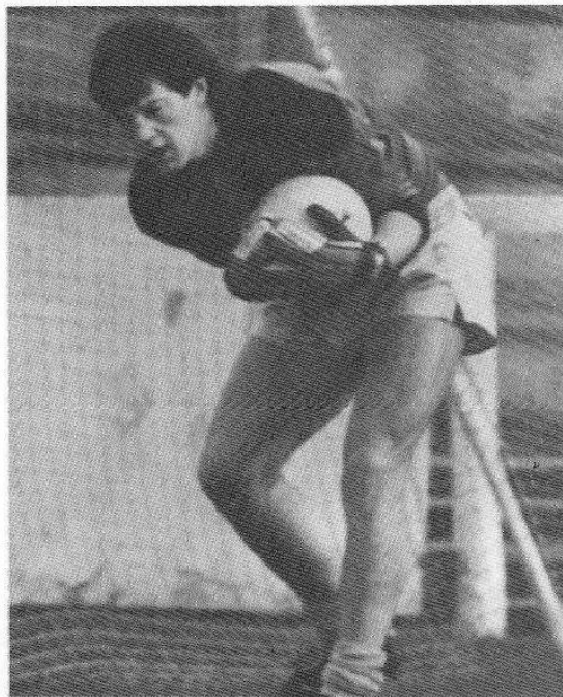


Declan Link flies in to slot this one home at St. Albans

were still some difficult fixtures to come, particularly during February, which began with the visit to 3rd placed Farnborough. The Wycombe contingent among the 1120 crowd were horrified to see their team take the field not only without Noel Ashford,



Declan Link goes close with this header in the 0-0 draw at Farnborough



Graham Bressington in the unfamiliar role as goalkeeper at Farnborough.

due to injury, but also with Graham Bressington wearing the goalkeepers jersey, Gary Lester having aggravated an injury in training 48 hours earlier and no reserve keeper being available. In the circumstances the 0-0 result was very acceptable and effectively ended any realistic hopes Farnborough had of remaining in the title race; their form during the final run-in slumped drastically, while Yeovil finally managed to achieve the kind of consistency they probably should have shown all season. Yeovil's third visit to Loakes Park, this time for league

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points, ended with the Somerset men recording another victory, with a solitary goal headed home directly from a corner. 2,473 people saw the match, a few of whom ended the day in police cells, after a number of Yeovil supporters were chased out of the ground. After a 3-0 home win over Mike Keen's Marlow (almost an ex-Wycombe XI) in the Berks & Bucks Quarter Finals, the short midweek trip to Windsor was obviously not going to finish with a similar result to the 11-1 County Cup romp. A clear-cut win was recorded though, with Declan Link's close range effort just before the break easing Wycombe's nerves, before Windsor, reduced to 10 men by a controversial sending-off, opened up again in the second period. Two Bressington specials were followed by both Mark Dawber and Neil Price notching their first ever goals for the Wanderers, and the 5-1 result put everyone in good spirit for the next Saturday's showdown with Slough Town at Loakes Park. Another crowd over 2,000 saw ex-Wanderer Kenny Wilson cause all kinds of problems for the home defence and inspired the Rebels to take a 1-0 lead, only for Jason Seacole to equalise before half-time. Two fine saves in the dying minutes by another ex-Wycombe player, Trevor Bunting, kept the scores level for a 1-1 result. The subsequent trip to Tooting resulted in another stalemate, despite Wycombe's almost total dominance of the play. Another dose of tense frustration came 7 days later with the visit of Harrow Borough, and the second consecutive goalless draw left Alan Gane to ponder on a sequence of 1 win from 6 league games.

There was a brief respite from the pressures of the League Championship at Gloucester the follow-



Declan Link moves aside as Jason Seacole blasts Wycombe's goal past Jeff Bateman in the 1-1 draw against Slough

ing Tuesday, when Noel Ashford became the first Wycombe player to play for England at Semi-Professional level, and scored a typically spectacular goal with a volley from the edge of the Wales penalty area. Noel was also to appear for England during a series of Internationals played in Scotland at the end of the season and also achieved the unusual distinction of playing for England (and scoring) against his own team-mates when Wycombe provided the England Squad with some match-practise at Bisham Abbey before the tournament in Scotland.

Back to the league story, now in late March. Just 7 fixture remained; there was still a healthy gap between ourselves and Yeovil, but the pressure was building up, and the trip to Worthing was made knowing that nothing less than 3 points could be considered satisfactory against the struggling seagulls. The depressing prospect of yet another goalless draw was increasing steadily as the hour mark was reached. A jaunt into the Worthing penalty area by Ashford ended with a badly judged tackle and gave Declan Link the chance to break the dead-

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Andy Graham and Trevor Bunting clash in the 1-1 draw with Slough. Noel Ashford and Jason Seacole stand by

lock from the penalty spot. The chance was missed, but thankfully 3 goals eventually sealed the vital points. Abingdon Town were then soundly beaten 5-0 to secure a place in the Berks & Bucks final, but at this point this was the least of our concerns. At Carshalton four days later it wasn't until the last 20 minutes that two goals secured another crucial victory. Carshalton had missed a first-half penalty, and



Noel Ashford clearly wins a penalty in our 3-0 win at Worthing



Declan Link secures our 3-0 victory at Worthing

it took a penalty converted by Mark West to open the scoring after he had come on as a substitute and been blatantly chopped over inside the box. Declan's emphatic finish a couple of minutes later sparked more celebration on the terraces – sorry, grass banks – as the Championship was now just 3 wins away, with 5 league matches to play.

Barking came to Loakes Park on the first Saturday in April – George Borg and his team having to use Wycombe's second strip for the afternoon – and though the result was only a narrow 2-1 win for the Wanderers, during the first half Wycombe had



Mark West coolly slots home the penalty which saved the day at Carshalton

played some of their best football of the season, with elegant, sweeping moves in torrential rain pulling the Barking defence apart, but only earning a 1-0 half-time lead. The return match with Carshalton was a strange affair; Kirk Corbin suffered an injury after 10 minutes which was to keep him out for the rest of the season, and his sudden absence from the back four, combined with the teams generally nervous approach, led to a jittery first-half performance during which the visitors spurned numerous guilt-edged opportunities to ruin the day for Alan Gane & Co. For a considerable time it was only Gary Lester and some horrendous shooting from Carshalton that kept us on course, but once Kevin Durham had shot through a crowd of players to put us ahead on the half-hour, there was no looking back, and the eventual 4-0 result left us knowing that the Championship could be clinched, realistically speaking, 2 days later at Bognor Regis.



Mark West tries to dig this penalty out of the mire against Bromley

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Literally hundreds of noisy fans made the trip to a misty Nyewood Lane that Monday night, and after 7 minutes they looked set to commence the celebrations as another penalty was earned by Noel, but the chance was missed by Declan. The score remained blank until with just a quarter of an hour remaining Kevin Day unfortunately deflected a hopeful cross past Gary Lester, but happily the last 15 minutes will remain etched on the memories of us all for a long time to come, as a mis-hit, scrambled equaliser by Kevin Durham and an own goal just seconds from full-time gave Wycombe a 2-1 win, 3 points, the VOL Championship, and a place in the Vauxhall Conference. Supporters, players and officials joined in unrestrained celebration, on the pitch, around the main stand and in the dressing rooms. After 8 months of dreaming, hoping, speculating, calculating and worrying, it all come true so suddenly.

From that point it seemed likely that the few remaining fixtures would be rather anti-climactic. In fact, those last few weeks were probably the most enjoyable ever spent with Wycombe Wanderers. Another last minute winner, this time by Andy Graham (which was appropriate as he had unfortunately missed the Bognor match, having missed the team coach) at Hitchin, secured another 2-1 win before the VOL officials presented the Championship Trophy to skipper Keith Barrett, and a fortnight later the final league match of the season was won by 4-1 at Dulwich. Wycombe had gone into this match knowing that victory would mean a record number of league wins by the club in one season, and that 4 goals would mean a record number of league goals. Mark Dawber duly smashed home the fourth goal 5 minutes from time, League

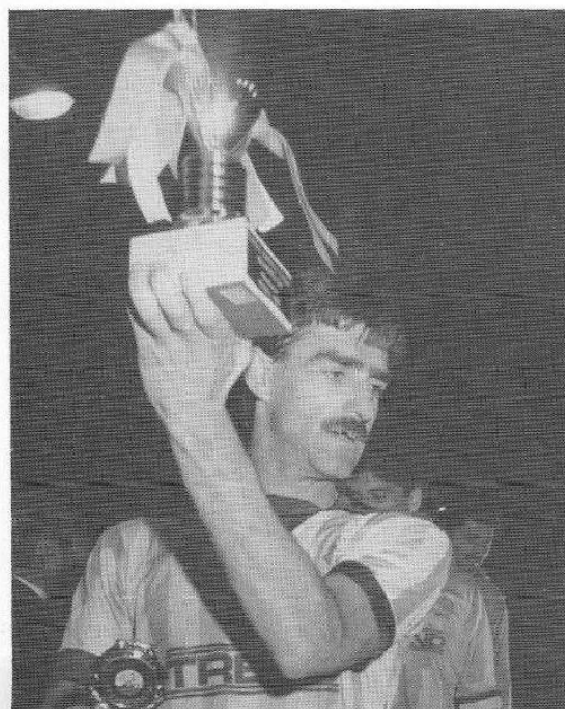
officials presented the players with their Championship medals, and it seemed that nothing was beyond Wycombe's capabilities now. Seven days earlier, in the quaint setting of the Wolverton Town ground, the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup had been taken from Aylesbury, whose tired players finally capitulated to extra-time goals by each of the Link brothers and Noel Ashford. A direct reversal of the previous season's final, this time it was Wycombe who had the last laugh, and this time it was the Aylesbury fans who trailed sadly out of the ground with their season falling around their ears.

quite spectacular volley led to yet another trophy presentation to Keith Barrett and his colleagues in front of a mass of supporters gathered around the main stand, who had witnessed the most enjoyable and successful season at Loakes Park for many years.



The successful Wycombe squad after the Berks & Bucks Cup Final victory

All that remained now was a 2-legged Capital League Presidents Cup Final with Barnet, the G.M.V.C. runners-up. Hitherto Capital League fixtures had been used, like other participating clubs, as little more than reserve matches, but both clubs agreed to field their strongest available sides for this Final. At the semi-final stage Wycombe had enjoyed an evening at Orient (or should I say Leyton Orient), a match which was won by 4-2, and the contest with Barnet was to provide yet another happy finale to the season. The first leg was played on the Hertfordshire club's bumpy, dust-bowl of a pitch on the May Day Bank Holiday afternoon and was won by a solitary Mark Dawber goal. The following Friday evening saw a 1,000 plus crowd turn out at Loakes Park, happy to have the opportunity to welcome home the successful Wycombe team. On Loakes Park's lush, green surface (perhaps even Rod Lavers deserving a Trophy for possibly being the only groundsman in non-league football actually prepared to water a pitch when necessary) the aggregate scores were deadlocked at 2-2 with the minutes ticking away, when Ashford spotted Kevin Durham ghosting into acres of space on the far side of the penalty area, and Kevin's



Keith Barrett holds aloft the Presidents Cup

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Noel Ashford and Mark Dawber cannot resist the chance to thank this Bognor defender who has just put through his own net to secure victory for the Blues.

The joyous Wycombe players celebrate after the game. Left to Right Anthony Riley, John Reardon, Mark Dawber, Declan Link, George Link, Alan Gane, Gary Lester, & Mark West



The successful Management Team relish the precious moments in the dressing room at Nyewood Road after the Bognor game. Left to right: Richard Teale (coach), John Reardon (Assistant Manager), Alan Gane (Manager) and Dave Jones (Physio).

Manager and Captain together Alan Gane and Keith Barrett show that at last the pressure is off and they can enjoy a bottle of bubbly.

